

For Immediate Release

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**Reminder: Hispanic and Women Farmers and Ranchers Claims Must be Postmarked by March 25**

WASHINGTON, February 8, 2013- Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today reminded Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers who allege discrimination by the USDA in past decades that there are 45 days remaining in the filing period closing March 25, 2013.

"Hispanic and women farmers who believe they have faced discriminatory practices in the past from the USDA have 45 days left to file a claim in order to have a chance to receive a cash payment or loan forgiveness," said Secretary Vilsack. "USDA urges potential claimants to contact the Claims Administrator for information and mail their claim packages on or before March 25, 2013."

The process offers a voluntary alternative to litigation for each Hispanic or female farmer and rancher who can prove that USDA denied his or her application for loan or loan servicing assistance for discriminatory reasons for certain time periods between 1981 and 2000. As announced in February 2011, the voluntary claims process will make available at least \$1.33 billion for cash awards and tax relief payments, plus up to \$160 million in farm debt relief, to eligible Hispanic and women farmers and ranchers. There are no filing fees to participate in the program.

The Department will continue reaching out to potential Hispanic and female claimants around the country to get the word out to individuals who may be eligible for this program so they have the opportunity to participate.

Call center representatives can be reached at 1-888-508-4429. Claimants may register for a claims package (by calling the number or visiting the website) or may download the forms from the website. All those interested in learning more or receiving information about the claims process and claims packages are encouraged to attend meetings in your communities about the claims process and contact the website at any time or call center telephone number Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time.

Website: [www.farmerclaims.gov](http://www.farmerclaims.gov)

Phone: 1-888-508-4429

Claims Period: September 24, 2012 - March 25, 2013.

Independent legal services companies will administer the claims process and adjudicate the claims. Although there are no filing fees to participate and a lawyer is not required to participate in the claims process, persons seeking legal advice may contact a lawyer or other legal services provider.

Under Secretary Vilsack's leadership, USDA has instituted a comprehensive plan to strengthen the Department as a model service provider and to ensure that every farmer and rancher is treated equally and fairly as part of "a new era of civil rights" at USDA. In February 2010, the Secretary announced the Pigford II settlement with African American farmers, and in October 2010, he announced the Keepseagle settlement with Native American farmers. Both of those settlements have since received court approval. Unlike the cases brought by African American and Native American farmers, the cases filed by Hispanic and women farmers over a decade ago were not certified as class actions. The claims process provides a voluntary alternative to continuing litigation for Hispanic and female farmers and ranchers who want to use it.

Audio and video public service announcements in English and Spanish from Secretary Vilsack and downloadable print and web banner ads on the Hispanic and women farmer claims process are available at:

[http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=PSAs\\_Print\\_and\\_WebBanner\\_Ads.xml](http://www.usda.gov/wps/portal/usda/usdahome?contentidonly=true&contentid=PSAs_Print_and_WebBanner_Ads.xml)

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USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer. To file a complaint of discrimination, write: USDA, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Ave., SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call (866) 632-9992 (Toll-free Customer Service), (800) 877-8339 (Local or Federal relay), (866) 377-8642 (Relay voice users).

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